

Libertyville, IL – U.S. Representatives Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Melissa Bean (D-IL), along with state and local leaders from Cook, Lake and McHenry counties, hosted the first hearing of the bipartisan Suburban Transportation Commission today to discuss the transportation needs of suburban Chicagoland. Representatives Kirk and Bean were joined by State Senators Matt Murphy and Michael Bond, Mayors Maria Rodriguez of Long Grove and Bill Gentes of Round Lake, Charlie Eldredge of the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation and Chris Robling of Jayne Thompson & Associates.

Kirk and Bean both vote on federal appropriations to support transportation projects in Illinois. Last year, the federal government provided \$280 million to the CTA, \$172 million to Metra and \$48 million to Pace. The Federal Highway Administration also provided over \$1 billion for Illinois roads. Federal studies show the average suburban commuter in our area is delayed 58 hours more per year, with commuting times up 57 percent.

“Two-thirds of Chicagoland residents now live in suburban Cook and the collar counties,” said Congressman Kirk. “Suburb-to-suburb commuting has increased by 56 percent while traditional suburb-to-city commuting increased only 9 percent. Our transportation plans should set a priority on the needs of the new suburban majority where our economy is growing fastest.”

The Commission heard testimony from Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Chairman Jim Reilly, Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano and Pace Board of Directors Lake County Representative Dick Welton regarding the status of suburban transportation investment in light of the current transportation funding crisis. Lake County Director of Transportation Martin Buehler and McHenry County Board Chairman Ken Koehler also testified regarding the development needs of collar counties.

“The CTA’s current pension crisis raises important issues regarding the future of transportation funding in northeastern Illinois,” said Congressman Kirk. “No one is arguing against helping the CTA, but not at the expense of suburban commuters. To fight gridlock, we need to invest in Metra’s 55-mile Suburban Transit Access Route (STAR Line). Mayor Daley rightly committed over \$10 billion in new investment to O’Hare Airport – the new economic center of our state. By connecting suburban communities to O’Hare, we will reduce gridlock while laying the foundation for our state’s 21st century economy.”

Commission members discussed multiple transportation issues before region, including:

- Driven by Chicago's loss of population, riders on the CTA declined by over 23 percent from 1985-2005 – while riders on Metra increased by over 10 percent.
- Transportation sales tax revenue from Cook and collar counties grew from \$623 million to over \$700 million in adjusted dollars between 1985 and 2005. While revenue declined in the city, it is up 3 percent in Lake, and 4 percent in Will and McHenry counties. The CTA gets 58 percent of this revenue, Metra 31 percent and Pace 11 percent. For every \$4 tax dollars given to Metra and Pace, \$6 are given to the CTA.
- The CTA proposed cutting Metra's funding from 31 percent of the total to 22 percent.
- The CTA pension fund is only 34 percent funded. As recently as 2000, it was 80 percent funded. The CTA took "Pension Holidays" in 1994, 1995 and 1997 and lost money in 2001 and 2002. Illinois Auditor General Holland reported "the process of setting [pension] contribution rates through collective bargaining is not common among transit agencies."
- The RTA provides the CTA with 97 percent (\$197m) of all its discretionary funds while Metra gets zero.
- Only one of five suburban families live within a mile of CTA services – 83 percent of suburban families live within a mile of Metra and Pace. Over 70 percent of the CTA's "suburban service" goes to just five communities (Evanston, Skokie, Cicero, Oak Park and Evergreen Park). Fifteen major suburban communities contribute to the CTA, but get no service.
- The government subsidizes Metra by 14 cents per mile and the CTA by 24 cents per mile.
- Auditor General Holland reported the CTA pays its top bus operators the second highest wages compared to its peers while absenteeism cost the agency \$46 million annually.

- Holland also reports that the top floor of the CTA Headquarters building (34,000 square feet) has been unoccupied since August of 2003.

The Suburban Transportation Commission also discussed proposed changes to the RTA's board. The current board balances city and suburban representation, requiring consensus. Past proposals of the 2004 Lipinski Commission would have given control to the city. A "one-person, one-vote" system would give control to the suburbs. Illinois Auditor General William Holland recently reported "the current allocation of RTA Board members is not consistent with the population distribution of the 2000 federal census."

With the full support of the Commission and 10 mayors from the 10th Congressional District, a draft list of ten "Suburban Transportation Principles" was introduced. The principles include:

1. Federal, state and local officials must work on a bipartisan basis to upgrade road, rail, aviation and transit systems in the Chicago suburbs.
2. Illinois Congressional leaders should join together to win the maximum return of federal transportation funding from Washington.
3. Improving the suburb's transportation infrastructure is essential to economic growth, environmental protection and enhanced quality of life for suburban families.
4. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) consensus system, which gives suburbs and the city veto power over major decisions, resulted in 30 years of no service interruptions, high bond ratings and financial stability for suburban commuters.
5. Reforms, if made to the RTA, should be made providing the citizens of the region with one-person, one-vote equality. Over half of all Illinois citizens now live in the suburbs.
6. Current RTA subsidies to the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra and Pace are allocated to appropriate formulas. Any effort to reform these formulas should be directed to emphasize suburb-to-suburb commuting, Chicago use of suburban transportation services and projects in communities where traffic congestion is a serious issue.
7. Regional transportation decisions should not diminish the authority of elected mayors and village councils over land use and zoning.
8. The organization of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) has been well received. Unwarranted changes to the structure of CMAP would undo the regional consensus that brought the Agency into existence.
9. Any increase in taxes, fees or other charges should be made only after they are individually approved by the voters of the region on a one-person, one-vote basis.
10. Reforms to the RTA and suburban transportation system should reflect open public debate and thoughtful consideration of experts and the press.

The Commission will meet again to take testimony on the needs of highways and our aviation infrastructure.